

## **DOMINICA**



**FOREIGN RELATIONS:** Like its Eastern Caribbean neighbors, the main priority of Dominica's foreign relations is economic development. The country maintains missions in Washington, New York, London, and Brussels and is represented jointly with other Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) members in Canada. Dominica also is a member of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the British Commonwealth. It became a member of the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1978 and of the World Bank and Organization of American States (OAS) in 1979. In March 2004, Dominica established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. In January 2008, Dominica joined the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA).

**U.S.-DOMINICAN RELATIONS:** The United States and Dominica have friendly bilateral relations. The United States supports the Dominican Government's efforts to expand its economic base and to provide a higher standard of living for its citizens. U.S. assistance is primarily channeled through multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), as well as through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) office in Bridgetown, Barbados. The Peace Corps also provides technical assistance to Dominica, and has volunteers on the island working primarily in education, youth development, and health.

In addition, the United States and Dominica work together in the battle against illegal drugs. Dominica cooperates with U.S. agencies and participates in counternarcotics programs in an effort to curb narco-trafficking and marijuana cultivation. In 1995, the Dominican Government signed a maritime law enforcement agreement with the United States to strengthen counternarcotics coordination, and in 1996, the government signed mutual legal assistance and extradition treaties to enhance joint efforts in combating international crime.

More Americans visit Dominica than any other national group. In 2008, tourist visitors totaled around 460,000, mainly from the United States, the French West Indies, the United Kingdom, and CARICOM.

The United States maintains no official presence in Dominica. The Ambassador and Embassy officers are resident in Barbados but travel frequently to Dominica.

**GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS:** Dominica has a Westminster-style parliamentary government, and there are three political parties--the Dominica Labour Party (the majority party), the Dominica United Workers Party, and the Dominica Freedom Party. A president and prime minister make up the executive branch. Nominated by the prime minister in consultation with the leader of the opposition party, the president is elected for a 5-year term by the parliament. The president appoints as prime minister the leader of the majority party in the parliament and also appoints, on the prime minister's recommendation, members of the parliament from the ruling party as cabinet ministers. The prime minister and cabinet are responsible to the parliament and can be removed on a no-confidence vote.

The unicameral parliament, called the House of Assembly, is composed of 21 regional representatives and nine senators. The regional representatives are elected by universal suffrage and, in turn, decide whether senators are to be elected or appointed. If appointed, five are chosen by the president with the advice of the prime minister and four with the advice of the opposition leader. If elected, it is by vote of the regional representatives. Elections for representatives and senators must be held at least every 5 years, although the prime minister can call elections any time. The last election was held in May 2005.

Dominica's legal system is based on English common law. There are three magistrate's courts, with appeals made to the Eastern Caribbean Court of Appeal and, ultimately, to the Privy Council in London.

Councils elected by universal suffrage govern most towns. Supported largely by property taxation, the councils are responsible for the regulation of markets and sanitation and the maintenance of secondary roads and other municipal amenities. The island is also divided into 10 parishes, whose governance is unrelated to the town governments.

**INVESTING IN PEOPLE:** Almost all Dominicans are descendants of enslaved Africans brought in by colonial planters in the 18th century. Dominica is the only island in the eastern Caribbean to retain some of its pre-Columbian population--the Carib Indians--about 3,000 of whom live on the island's east coast. The population growth rate is very low, due primarily to emigration to more prosperous Caribbean Islands, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada.

English is the official language; however, because of historic French domination, the most widely spoken dialect is a French patois. Nearly 80% of the population is Catholic. In recent years, a number of Protestant churches have been established.

**HISTORY:** The island's indigenous Arawak people were expelled or exterminated by Caribs in the 14th century. Columbus landed there in November 1493. Spanish ships frequently landed on Dominica during the 16th century, but fierce resistance by the Caribs discouraged Spain's efforts at settlement.

In 1635, France claimed Dominica. Shortly thereafter, French missionaries became the first European inhabitants of the island. Carib incursions continued, though, and in 1660, the French and British agreed that both Dominica and St. Vincent should be abandoned. Dominica was officially neutral for the next century, but the attraction of its resources remained; rival expeditions of British and French foresters were harvesting timber by the start of the 18th century.

Largely due to Dominica's position between Martinique and Guadeloupe, France eventually became predominant, and a French settlement was established and grew. As part of the 1763 Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years' War, the island became a British possession. In 1778, during the American Revolutionary War, the French mounted a successful invasion with the active cooperation of the population. The 1783 Treaty of Paris, which ended the war, returned the island to Britain. French invasions in 1795 and 1805 ended in failure.

In 1763, the British established a legislative assembly, representing only the white population. In 1831, reflecting a liberalization of official British racial attitudes, the Brown Privilege Bill conferred political and social rights on free nonwhites. Three Blacks were elected to the legislative assembly the following year. Following the abolition of slavery, in 1838 Dominica became the first and only British Caribbean colony to have a Black-controlled legislature in the 19th century. Most Black legislators were smallholders or merchants who held economic and social views diametrically opposed to the interests of the small, wealthy English planter class. Reacting to a perceived threat, the planters lobbied for more direct British rule.

In 1865, after much agitation and tension, the colonial office replaced the elective assembly with one comprised of one-half elected members and one-half appointed. Planters allied with colonial administrators outmaneuvered the elected legislators on numerous occasions. In 1871, Dominica became part of the Leeward Island Federation. The power of the Black population progressively eroded. Crown Colony government was re-established in 1896. All political rights for the vast majority of the population were effectively curtailed. Development aid, offered as compensation for disenfranchisement, proved to have a negligible effect.

Following World War I, an upsurge of political consciousness throughout the Caribbean led to the formation of the Representative Government Association. Marshaling public frustration with the lack of a voice in the governing of Dominica, this group won one-third of the popularly elected seats of the legislative assembly in 1924 and one-half in 1936. Shortly thereafter, Dominica was transferred from the Leeward Island Administration and was governed as part of the Windwards until 1958, when it joined the short-lived West Indies Federation.

After the federation dissolved, Dominica became an associated state of the United Kingdom in 1967 and formally took responsibility for its internal affairs. On November 3, 1978, the Commonwealth of Dominica was granted independence by the United Kingdom.

Independence did little to solve problems stemming from centuries of economic underdevelopment, and in mid-1979, political discontent led to the formation of an interim government. It was replaced after the 1980 elections by a government led by the Dominica Freedom Party under Prime Minister Eugenia Charles, the Caribbean's first female prime minister. Chronic economic problems were compounded by the severe impact of hurricanes in 1979 and in 1980. By the end of the 1980s, the economy recovered, but weakened again in the 1990s due to a decrease in banana prices.

In the January 2000 elections, the Edison James United Workers Party (UWP) was defeated by the Dominican Labour Party (DLP), led by Roosevelt P. "Rosie" Douglas. Douglas died after only a few months in office and was replaced by Pierre Charles, who died in office in January 2004. Roosevelt Skerrit, also of the DLP, replaced Charles as Prime Minister. Under Prime Minister Skerrit's leadership, the DLP won elections in May 2005 that gave the party 12 seats in the 21-member Parliament to the UWP's 8 seats. An independent candidate affiliated with the DLP won a seat as well. Since that time, the independent candidate joined the government and one UWP member crossed the aisle, making the current total 14 seats for the DLP and 7 for the UWP.

**ECONOMIC GROWTH:** Many consider Dominica's economic situation the most challenging of all the Eastern Caribbean states. However, Dominica's economy grew by 3.5% in 2005 and 4.0% in 2006, following a decade of poor performance. The country nearly had a financial crisis in 2003 and 2004. Growth in 2006 was attributed to gains in tourism, construction, offshore and other services, and some sub-sectors of the banana industry. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently praised the Government of Dominica for its successful macroeconomic reforms. The IMF also pointed out remaining challenges, including further reductions in public debt, increased financial sector regulation, and market diversification.

Bananas and other agriculture dominate Dominica's economy, and nearly one-third of the labor force works in agriculture. This sector, however, is highly vulnerable to weather conditions and to external events affecting commodity prices. In 2007, Hurricane Dean caused significant damage to the agricultural sector as well as the country's infrastructure, especially roads. In response to reduced European Union (EU) banana trade preferences, the government has diversified the agricultural sector by introducing coffee, patchouli, aloe vera, cut flowers, and exotic fruits such as mangoes, guavas, and papayas. Dominica has had some success in increasing its manufactured exports, primarily soap.

Dominica is mostly volcanic and has few beaches; therefore, tourism has developed more slowly than on neighboring islands. Nevertheless, Dominica's high, rugged mountains, rainforests, freshwater lakes, hot springs, waterfalls, and diving spots make it an attractive eco-tourism destination. Cruise ship stopovers have increased following the development of modern docking and waterfront facilities in the capital.

Dominica's currency is the Eastern Caribbean Dollar (EC\$), a regional currency shared among members of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU). The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) issues the EC\$, manages monetary policy, and regulates and supervises commercial banking activities in its member countries. The ECCB has kept the EC\$ pegged at EC\$2.7=U.S. \$1.

Dominica is a beneficiary of the U.S. Caribbean Basin Initiative that grants duty-free entry into the United States for many goods. Dominica also belongs to the predominantly English-speaking Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).